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TAGS: [ECON](#) [TNGD](#) [TPHY](#) [MU](#)  
SUBJECT: RESEARCH CAPACITY LACKING IN OMAN

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Summary  
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¶1. Oman's lack of research capacity stands to hinder its drive toward doubling the Sultanate's GDP by 2020, according to an international consulting firm hired by the country's Research Council. The firm recommended that the government build research programs around the water, energy, petrochemicals, and agriculture/marine biotechnology sectors through better funding, the reduction of red tape, and the establishment of high-caliber graduate programs. End Summary.

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Low Research Capacity  
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¶2. On October 21, Econoff attended the "International Conference on the Sultanate of Oman's Research Strategy," sponsored by Oman's Research Council. Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al-Said, Chairman of the Research Council, told participants in his opening remarks that Oman needed to develop greater research capacity to meet the Sultanate's objectives of doubling GDP, diversifying the economy, promoting private sector development, and building human resources. For this reason, the government would concentrate on boosting research efforts in the energy and industry, science, and education fields.

¶3. Musadiq Malik, Regional Vice President for CRA International -- the Massachusetts-based consulting firm retained by the government to develop its research agenda -- followed Sayyid Shihab by explaining that Oman's envisioned objectives were achievable, so long as the government reduced its dependence on oil revenues. In order to meet targets established in Vision 2020, the government's long-range planning document, Malik noted that the government would need to close the gap in research quality. He pointed out that the number of researchers in Oman was currently very low, and that 70% of those were expatriates. Malik also found Oman's spending on research relative to its GDP to be meager in comparison with world leaders, leading to paltry levels of innovation. For example, he stated that between 2001-2004, Oman only registered one patent, compared to an average of 94,000 per year for the United States.

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Sectors Identified  
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¶5. In charting a course for Oman, Malik suggested that the Sultanate focus on developing niche areas of expertise in the region. He identified water, energy, petrochemicals, and agriculture/marine biotechnology as sectors ripe for exploration. Impediments, such as lack of resources, lack of

organizational direction, bureaucratic burdens, and insufficient expertise would need to be overcome in order to promote research growth. In laying the foundation for research excellence, Malik highlighted regulatory reform and funding as key components, followed by the importance of creating doctoral programs around high-caliber professors.

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Full Government Support  
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¶6. Comment. The Research Council, established by Royal Decree, has the full support of the Sultan. The conference itself was sponsored by Sayyid E'sad bin Tariq al-Said as the personal representative of the Sultan, and included the attendance of several high ranking ministers from the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, National Economy, Higher Education, Social Development, and Manpower. Significant government interest and investment in the research sector will be essential for Oman to overcome the obstacles identified by CRA in establishing a strong presence in the Gulf. End Comment.  
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